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ABSTRACT

A study used three Newbery books--"The Voyages of Dr. Doolittle (Lofting, 1922), "Charlotte's Web" (White, 1952), and "Maniac Magee" (Spinelli, 1990)--to examine three female characters identified in these books in the role of rescuer, accentuating their commonalities and differences within Jungian and feminist theory in literary criticism. Since many research studies cite locus of control as the determining factor in school achievement and retention rates, initially a coding scheme was developed using locus of control as the conceptual framework. In a larger content analysis, 140 fictional Newbery protagonists were classified into eight categories which collapsed into internal and external locus of control. The books were read by two readers, and notes were taken separately by each. A progressive process of reading, taking notes, and pattern sorting was used to analyze these female characters. The most striking commonality among the three characters is that all represent the archetypical Mother, although none were biologically related to the protagonists. Polynesia, the parrot, in "Dr. Doolittle" and Charlotte, the spider, in "Charlotte's Web," both non-human characters, provide archetypes of Mother, and Amanda Beale, in "Maniac Magee," portrays the maternal archetype as well as a conventional heroine in the masculine tradition of employing physical power. This analysis may offer insights for educators who share the dual challenge of providing young readers with literature that includes the diversity of robust female characters and of teaching critical thinking skills so as to understand the roles of heroes and rescuers. (Contains 1 table and 22 references.) (CR)

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RUNNING HEAD: FEMALE RESCUER

ED 419 239

The female rescuer in Newbery books: Who is she?

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The female rescuer in Newbery books: Who is she?

"Reading offers children both a window by which they may view the lives of others and a mirror to examine their own reflections in the characters they meet." (Cullinan, 1989, p. 248).

Many consider literature at any level to be a window into the mores and social concerns of the culture at the time it was written (Cullinan, 1989). Even more intensely than literature in general, children's literature often serves as a mirror, not only for personal reflection, but of the larger culture because children's literature is a population of books written to influence an intended audience (children) by a different population (adults). Whether a window or mirror into the cultural context of the times, children's literature remains an important and interesting body of data to research. One question researched within this paper is: Who are the female characters in award-winning children's literature that reflect our culture's models or images of heroes?

Purposes

This paper focuses on a select group of three Newbery books: The Voyages of Dr. Dolittle (Lofting, 1922), Charlotte's Web (White, 1952), and Maniac Magee (Spinelli, 1990). As part of a larger content analysis of 140 fictional works awarded the Newbery Medal and Honor Award (1922 to 1996), Roberts (1997) identified only three male protagonists who were rescued by female characters. This paper examines these three female characters in their role of rescuer, accentuating their commonalities and differences within Jungian and feminist theory.

Conceptual Framework

Because of the many research studies which cite internal locus of control as the determining factor in school achievement (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld, & York, 1966; Harshway, 1990; Wolf & Chandler, 1980), retention and completion rates (Stone, 1992), adjustment to college (Mooney, 1991) and preventative

healthcare behaviors (Reeh & Reilly, 1995), I developed a coding scheme using locus of control as the conceptual framework (Roberts, 1997). In the larger content analysis, 140 fictional Newbery protagonists were categorized into the following discrete categories (Roberts, 1997). These eight categories collapse into internal (**a-d**) and external (**e-h**) locus of control. Protagonists in Newbery books were coded as solving the central conflict through:

a. creative reasoning or intellect,

b. conflict ceasing to be perceived as a problem,

c. physical means or tools,

d. cooperative efforts or compromise,

e. unrequested intervention of same sex character/s,

f. *unrequested intervention of opposite sex character/s,*

g. unrequested intervention of both sex characters, or

h. some supernatural or natural occurrence.

Table 1 provides the results of coding 140 books using the coding scheme developed to highlight the ways conflict was resolved according to internal and external locus of control. While each category held aspects which were interesting for further study, the small number of male protagonists (3) in category ***f*** prompted me to initiate the study presented here.

In analyzing the characters within these three significant works, I applied two theories of literary criticism. One of the conceptual frameworks applied in this paper is Jungian theory (1959), which highlights archetypes as a kind of template or pattern. Just as literary criticism with a Jungian slant is devoted to detecting archetypal characters, such as the Divine Child, The Earth Mother, and The Enchanted Prince in myths, legends, and fairy tales (Chesebro,Bertelsen & Gencarelli, 1990; Lasser, 1979), Jungian theory assisted in the analysis of these three female characters. As young readers read these influential and

highly available Newbery books, what is the archetype they will find in terms of females who take on the role of rescuers for males?

In addition to archetypal criticism, feminist theory was another conceptual framework that was employed as a means of interpreting the characteristics of these female rescuers (Gilligan, 1982; Polster, 1992; Stearney, 1994; Vandergrift, 1993, 1996). Miriam Polster argued that alternative views of what constitutes a hero should be considered rather than the 'male-skewed images' which contain physical strength and aggressive behavior (cited in Crew, 1996). Rather than traditional heroic acts which call the hero away from family and the familiar to the unknown, women's heroism (Polster, 1992) often goes undetected because it is "rooted in the particular circumstances and values of women's lives, where connection and relationship may not be quickly stated in adversarial terms "(p. 18).

Data Sources

The only three female characters who rescue male protagonists in Newbery books from 1922 to 1996 were identified as Polynesia the parrot in The Voyages of Dr. Dolittle (Lofting, 1922), Charlotte the spider in Charlotte's Web (White, 1952), and Amanda Beale in Maniac Magee (Spinelli, 1990). Newbery Medal (winner) and Honor (runners-up) Award books are the American Library Association's annual award given to outstanding literature for young readers aged 8 to 14 published in the United States the year prior. Using this highly accessible and often recommended population of books allowed analysis of some of the most influential children's literature with publication dates spanning various cultural eras from 1922 to 1996.

Methods

Using literary criticism as the general technique, I explored the commonalities and differences among each of the three female characters who rescued male protagonists. I reread each of the three books. In order to provide a baseline for rater reliability, a second reader read each of the three books as well. First, our coding of the three books according

to Roberts (1997) locus of control categories matched each other as being category *f* for each of the three books. Second, both I and the second reader separately took notes in a narrative format in order to outline ways that the three characters are either alike or different. Following Glesne and Peshkin's (1992) recommendations for analyzing narrative data, a progressive process of reading, taking notes, and sorting for patterns was used to analyze these female characters. Audiotapes of our conversations which include supporting quotations were made to document the pattern or theme we detected. These patterns were then synthesized into commonalities or theme/s with direct quotations from each of the books kept alongside as supporting evidence.

Results

Who is she; who is this female rescuer? In considering these three females, the most striking commonality among the female rescuers is that they each represent the archetypal Mother. Although none of the three females who rescued male protagonists are biologically related to the protagonists, they each act as a maternal figure to the male protagonists. Quite serendipitously, the three characters who rescued male protagonists happened to be from three distinct time periods. The publication dates are respectively from the 20s, the 50s and the 90s; therefore, for comparison's sake, there are easily definable eras, mores, social norms, and cultural expectations from each of these time periods.

The written notes and audiotapes of conversations document the pattern of the archetypal Mother that I detected. I proceeded to use quotations from the book within the following subcategories of maternal traits: nurturing, bossy or directive, helpful, patient, willing to make sacrifices, organizing, and facilitating maturity. Simultaneously yet separately, the second reader noted the following commonalities among the three characters: practical voices or planners, unselfish and supportive, persistent and hard working, helpful in times of crisis, confident, and nurturing. This agreement between readers fueled further analysis in which the archetype of Mother could be elaborated within each of the three characters.

Polynesia the parrot, traditional mother

The earliest novel to be coded as a female character rescuing a male protagonist was provided within the book, The Voyages of Dr. Dolittle (Lofting, 1922). Polynesia the parrot provided a vivid archetype of Mother. In fact, the duality of Mother as described by Bettelheim (1975) into the evil stepmother and the uncontaminated good fairy godmother that is ever-present in fairy tales, was easily seen here. Throughout much of the book, Polynesia's role is focused upon her directive, even bossy, nature.

> If there is anything happening I am not quite sure of, she is always able to put me right, to tell me exactly about it. In fact sometimes, I almost think I ought to say that this book was written by Polynesia instead of me. (Lofting, 1922, p.2)

Poly also serves as a practical voice reminding the male protagonist to be on his best behavior:

> Great work! But listen. I smell danger. I think you had better get back to the ship now as quickly and quietly as you can. Put your overcoat on over that giddy suit. I don't like the looks of this crowd.... I think this would be a good time for us to get away. (Lofting, 1922, p.194)

Poly plays the role of monitor who watches Tommy and Dr. Dolittle's behavior and reminds them to consider the real world. She reminds them to keep things in perspective. When Dr. Dolittle is too unselfish, Poly notes,

> There he goes, lending his last blessed penny...all the money we had for the whole trip! Now we haven't got the price of a postage stamp...Well, let's pray that we don't run out of food. Why doesn't he give them the ship and just walk home? (Lofting, 1922, p. 158)

Listen to the tone of voice Poly uses when she implores Tommy to obey her, "We must search the hold. If this is allowed to go on, we'll all be starving before a week is out. Come downstairs with me, Tommy, and we'll look into this matter." (Lofting, 1922, p. 163). No doubt, this is the mother we all need to help us realize the reality of day-to-day living and

surviving. This practical side of the duality of Mother represents what Bettelheim (1976) refers to as the evil stepmother and even though it is helpful to children in the long run, a mother's persistence nags at us all. Psychoanalytically dividing Mother into these two sides creates a safe place for us to hate the nagging side of mothers while simultaneously loving them with equal zeal for saving us as fairy godmothers.

The good side (as represented by fairy godmothers in fairy tales) of Poly's duality might best be illustrated by her constant unselfishness. Poly, like the stereotypical mother, makes physical and mental sacrifices for Tommy by staying awake all night to guide the ship safely in its route:

> Besides that, Polynesia, who was an older sailor than any of us, and really knew a lot about running ships, seemed to be always awake-except when she took a couple of winks in the sun, standing on one leg beside the wheel. (Lofting, 1922, p. 162)

Polynesia captures the role of fairy godmother at the end of the book by intervening without any request from Tommy. Just when everthing looks hopeless and Tommy Stubbins needs help the most, Polynesia the parrot comes to the rescue and plans every detail to return him home. In this role, Polynesia is the archetype of the fairy godmother who arranges everything from convincing the snail to provide transportation to occupying Dr. Dolittle. All is well after the archetypal godmother works her organizational magic, because what Tommy wanted most of all was to return home. The directive and practical voice as well as the protective custody and unselfish nature of Polynesia exemplify the traditional archetypal Mother.

Charlotte, the nurturer

The second book, Charlotte's Web (White, 1952), that contains a female character who rescued a male protagonist also involves nonhuman characters like Polynesia. The character of Charlotte the spider in Charlotte's Web (White, 1952) provided a strong example of a female character rescuing a male protagonist. Charlotte is the archetypal Mother throughout the book. In an article focusing on "mothering" , Rollin (1990, p. 44)

notes that " ...Charlotte the spider takes over the mothering of Wilbur- a different form of mothering". Unlike Fern who originally fed and cared for Wilbur, Charlotte never feeds Wilbur. Additionally, Charlotte and Wilbur never touch each other either. Yet, Charlotte establishes herself as a maternal figure to Wilbur. Listen to the tone of this statement by Charlotte to Wilbur: "That remains to be seen. But I am going to save you, and I want you to quiet down immediately. You're carrying on in a childish way. Stop your crying! I can't stand hysterics." (White, 1952, p. 51). With words as fodder rather than the food at the trough, Charlotte feeds and mothers Wilbur. Throughout the book, her words carry admonishments, orders, advice, chastisements, compliments, lullabies, stories, and finally the very messages woven in the web that save Wilbur (Rollins, 1990).

Indeed, the "novel's references to Charlotte and Wilbur as 'friends' probably results from the absence of touch and feeding in their relationship, but Charlotte is no less a mother object" (Rollin, 1990, p. 44). New to the barn, Wilbur is naive and learning about the world in the barn; he is definitely in need of a friend and a motherly one at that. Charlotte is the one who aids Wilbur in his journey to maturity. Taking maternal charge, Charlotte even patiently puts Wilbur to bed.

> "May I go...see if I left any of my supper in the trough?"
>
> "Very well," said Charlotte. "But I want you in bed again without delay."(White, 1952, p. 64)

Charlotte's steadfast caring and sacrifice is displayed throughout the book with examples such as the following:

> "Tell me a story, Charlotte!", said Wilbur, as he lay waiting for sleep to come.
>
> "Tell me a story!"
>
> So Charlotte, although she, too, was tired, did what Wilbur wanted. "Once upon a time..." (White, 1952, p. 102)

She stands up for Wilbur and helps him overcome difficult interactions with the other animals in the barnyard, for example, who say he is the smelliest animal: "Let Wilbur

alone!" she (Charlotte) said. "He has a perfect right to smell, considering his surroundings. You are no sweet pea yourself." (White, 1952, p. 61). Even Charlotte's orders such as "...now stop arguing and go get some sleep!" (White, 1952, p. 91) all prepare Wilbur to grow into the unselfish pig who will love and care for Charlotte's babies upon her death. Charlotte's ingenuity, assertiveness, and skill in creating the web certainly saves Wilbur's life, dismissing the certainty of his slaughter. Wilbur is not only rescued by Charlotte, but he is also transformed by her nurturing friendship. Charlotte, as the archetypal Mother, is able to lead Wilbur out of his naive world that ignores the inevitability of her death or of his becoming bacon. Charlotte, as well as mothers in the real world, prepare us for becoming the next generation and for ultimately living without them.

Amanda Beale, androgynous mom of the 90s

The character of Amanda Beale in the story of Maniac Magee (Spinelli, 1990) is the last book among the 140 Newbery Award winners to be coded as having a female character who came to the aid of the male protagonist. Amanda Beale is a recurring female figure in Maniac Magee's life unlike the traditional male idea of the hero from afar. Amanda Beale, who is African American, sensitively notices this white boy standing in the middle of her sidewalk who appears homeless. Further, while Amanda is tough and savy on the edges, she notices that he is helpless to know how to interact with black folks in her part of town. Amanda's role as the maternal archetype expands to show Maniac Magee how the world works, intellectually and socially. Homeless and without parents, Maniac Magee is in need of someone to provide knowledge and Amanda is quickly cast into that role. In fact, one of Amanda's first significant interactions with Maniac Magee is symbolic in that she loans her treasured "A" encyclopedia to him: "Amanda, upon giving up her most prized possession, stopped and turned. 'Ohhh,' she squeaked. She tore the book from the suitcase, hurled it at him- 'Here!' and she dashed into school." (Spinelli, 1990, p. 13).

Amanda also possesses the instincts and drive of a mother grizzly bear. Just as a mother protects her young, Amanda attempts to protect Maniac Magee in various ways. In

the following instance, Amanda physically saves Maniac Magee from the gang and the gang leader, Mars Bars, by bravely kicking Mars Bars:

> "You ripped my book."
>
> Mars Bar's eyes went big as headlights, "I did not."
>
> "You did. You lie." She let the bike fall to Maniac. She grabbed the book and started kicking Mars Bar in his beloved sneakers. "I got a little brother and a little sister that crayon all over my books, and I got a dog that eats them and poops on them, and that's just inside my own family, and I'm not gonna have nobody else messin' with my books! You understand?" (Spinelli, 1990, p. 39)

Soon Maniac Magee comes to a physical and symbolic crossroad in his life. Maniac Magee never perceives the unwritten rules in his social system as evidenced in the scene where Amanda Beale's dad attempts to drive the homeless Magee to his nonexistent house:

> Mr. Beale knew what his passenger (Maniac Magee) apparently didn't: East End is East End and West End was West End, and the house this white lad (Magee) was pointing to was filled with black people, just like every other house on up to Hector Street." (Spinelli, 1990, p. 43).

With consistency, Amanda is there to coach Maniac through the ordeal of losing his innocence in terms of crossing the color line:

> About never crossing the "boundary"--why were they laughing? The Cobras were standing at Hector Street. Hector Street was the boundary between the East and West ends. Or, to put it another way, between the blacks and whites. Not that you never saw a white in the East End or a black in the West End. People did cross the line now and then, especially if they were adults and it was daylight. But nighttime, forget it. And if you were a kid, day or night, forget it. (Spinelli, 1990, p.32)

Throughout the book, Amanda tries to show him and tell him about these boundaries and inform him of the dangers inherent in their racist culture. Ironically, it is Amanda and her

family, rather than Maniac Magee, who are the ones to reap some of the pain from crossing the line when someone spray paints "Fish Belly" on the side of their home.

While Amanda Beale portrays the maternal archetype in her role as protector and by providing a window out of his naiveté, she also portrays a conventional heroine in the masculine tradition of employing physical power, such as kicking Mars Bars. Moreover, in the last chapter, Amanda leaves her own familiar setting to solve the conflict surrounding Maniac Magee's need for a home. In the middle of the night, with Mars Bars trailing, Amanda physically rescues Maniac Magee from the buffalo pen at the zoo and takes him to her own house, gives up her own room and bed:

> "You got it all wrong, buster.You ain't got --ouuu, see"---she kicked him -- "You do not have a choice. I am not asking you. I'm telling you. You are coming to my home with me, and you are going to sleep in my room, which is going to be your room...You are going to sleep there tonight and tomorrow night and the night after that ...and every night...This is not your home! Now move!!" (Spinelli, 1990, p. 183)

Certainly, Amanda Beale (Spinelli, 1990) can be viewed as a heroine because her character has been patterned after the male tradition of physical heroes. However, her nurturing and caring spirit coupled with her spunk, cleverness, physical prowess, and the power of knowledge gives the character of Amanda Beale an androgynous edge which sets her apart from the other two female characters. Her directiveness, her sacrifices, her leading Maniac Magee into this new world, and her physical empowerment allow us to see the archetypal Mother of the 90s.

To value masculine or feminine heroes/heroines or not to value

Deciding whether or not the archetype of Mother as heroine elevates or denigrates women's status is an interesting question for feminist theorists. While allowing female characters the freedom to assume the same sorts of power roles that a masculine view of

heroism purports (i.e., physical means, from afar), this traditional view may provide little validation for the long-term courageous and nurturing acts of either gender.

Some form of poetic justice can be derived from valuing the traditional feminine kinds of nurturing as just as powerful a picture of heroism as the stereotypic knight on a steed. On the other hand, acknowledging the archetype of mother in heroic acts may reduce women back to the stereotypical female who constantly takes care of others, rescues them, and never takes care of her own needs. This way of thinking may even exacerbate the problem by being what some in the 90s call "enablers." Hopefully future discussion on this topic might be enhanced by opening up a more androgynous view of males and females in the role of rescuer. No doubt, both books and the real world need avenues that allow men to be more nurturing and women to be more physically assertive.

Concluding remarks: The educational importance of examining female rescuers

"Women's heroism has been equally brave and equally original as that of men. But because in some forms it differs from the traditional pattern of heroism, it has often gone unrecognized..." Miriam Polster (1992, p. 19)

First, the important albeit rare contributions that female characters made as rescuers in Newbery books can serve as role models for young readers. Young readers, both male and female, are in need of the diversity of strong characters with examples of femininity and masculinity that shatter stereotypic roles. While I was pleased that my original schema based on internal and external locus of control served as a filter which captured both male and female ideas of heroism, what is disturbing is the total absence of females in any other heroic roles other than that of Mother. Second, realizing the influence, popularity, longevity (from 1922 to present), and the sheer availability of Newbery Medal and Honor books make this population of stories a valuable collection for analyses.

Because these books are recommended to young readers (ages 8-14 years) who are both impressionable and who are also able to read these books independently, the

importance of examining relationships among gender roles, various archetypes and stereotypic characters is accentuated. This analysis may serve as a launching pad for discussion or may provide insights for educators who share the dual challenge to provide young readers with literature that includes the diversity of robust female characters and to teach readers critical thinking skills so as to understand the roles of heroes and rescuers.

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Table 1

Comparison of Female and Male Newbery Protagonists According to Eight Categories Reflecting Locus of Control

	Protagonists	
	female	**male**
Categories	freq (%)	freq (%)
A: creative reasoning	7 (13.5%)	8 (9.1%)
B: adjustment factor	15 (28.8%)	16 (18.2%)
C: physical means	3 (5.8%)	10 (11.4%)
D: cooperative means	7 (13.5%)	5 (5.7%)
E: same sex intervention	2 (3.8%)	25 (28.4%)
F: opposite sex intervention	9 (17.3%)	3 (3.4%)
G: both sex intervention	3 (5.8%)	4 (4.5%)
H: super/nat'l intervention	6 (11.5%)	17 (19.3%)
Totals	52 (100%)	88 (100%)

STATISTICS FOR THE ABOVE TABLE

Statistic	DF	Value	Prob
Chi-Square	7	24.565	0.001

Sample Size = 140